



# SheepSense

an applied research brief

## Raising a Freezer Lamb, What Does it Cost?

### Summary

Raising a lamb for homegrown freezer meat can be rewarding, but is it cost-effective? Many families underestimate the true expenses involved. This brief walks through actual costs of raising a lamb to butcher weight and compares them to store prices, helping producers make informed decisions.

### Understanding the True Cost of Raising a Lamb

While buying a lamb to raise for freezer meat is a popular idea, there are more costs involved than just the animal and processing. This example follows a typical season raising a lamb from purchase to butcher, outlining the feed, facilities, veterinary costs, and the return in packaged meat.



*The total cost to raise a single lamb ranges from \$566 to \$701, averaging about \$633 — roughly \$6.00 per pound of processed meat.*

### Initial Purchase and Setup Costs

The initial investment begins with purchasing the lamb. Based on a five-year market average of \$220/cwt (hundred weight), an 80 pound lamb costs about \$176. Before bringing the animal home, basic infrastructure is needed. Including, a used round bale feeder, barbed wire fencing, a shelter constructed from plywood and posts, and a stock tank with a float valve. These items are expected to last at least seven years, and their costs can be amortized over multiple animals. Labor and setup time were not included in the cost analysis, as many families enjoy completing these projects together.

**7 years** — Expected lifespan for infrastructure items like feeders, fencing, shelter, and water tank



## Feeding the Lamb

For the first two weeks, the lamb is fed free-choice grass hay, consuming about 2 to 3 pounds per day. Hay is sourced locally at \$140 per ton. After this period, the lamb's diet is gradually supplemented with grain, a mix of corn, oats, and barley purchased at \$16.50 per 100 pound bag. Over the next 13 weeks, the grain intake increases from a half a pound to roughly 4.5 pounds per day while hay is reduced to 1 pound daily. Grain feeding improves the rate of gain and aligns the flavor of the meat with what is typically found in grocery stores.

## Processing and Yield

By January, the lamb should reach about 150 pounds with a well finished appearance. Processing costs around \$300 and results in approximately 56 pounds of cut and wrapped meat. Roughly 30 percent of that, around 16.8 pounds, consists of premium cuts like loins and chops. The remaining 70 percent, or 39.2 pounds, includes roasts and ground meat.

**56 lbs** — Average packaged meat yield from a 150 lb lamb

## Cost Breakdown & Grocery Comparison

The total cost to raise a single lamb ranges from \$566 to \$701, averaging about \$633. This breaks down to roughly \$6.00 per pound of processed meat. Comparatively, grocery store lamb prices range from \$4.50 to \$10.00 per pound for lower-end cuts, while premium cuts like loins and chops run between \$10.00 and \$30.00 per pound. Purchasing 56 pounds of lamb from a store could cost between \$415 and \$913, averaging \$664. Home-raised lamb may cost the same or be slightly cheaper than store purchased meat overall, but is comparable in price to high-quality, locally sourced cuts.

**Table 1: Comprehensive Cost Summary (per lamb)**

| Cost Category  | Low Estimate | High Estimate |
|--|--------------|---------------|
| <b>Feeder Lamb Purchase Price (~80 lb @ \$1.98/lb)</b> | \$176        | \$176         |
| <b>Feed &amp; Grain</b>                                | \$100        | \$150         |
| <b>Health/Vet Care</b>                                 | \$15         | \$25          |
| <b>Processing (Slaughter &amp; Cutting)</b>            | \$250        | \$300         |
| <b>Infrastructure &amp; Overhead</b>                   | \$25         | \$50          |
| <b>Total Cost</b>                                      | \$566        | \$701         |

## Intrinsic Benefits Beyond Cost

While the financial savings may not always be significant, raising a lamb offers many non-monetary rewards. It's an opportunity to teach children responsibility, provides a level of transparency about the animal's life and feed, and created a sense of pride in producing food for your own family. The meat may also be higher in quality depending how the animal is raised and fed.

### Table 2: Retail Cut Breakdown and Value

Below is a summary of typical lamb cuts, estimated yields per cut, and corresponding retail prices based on current U.S. market rates. Prices vary by region and production method (conventional, grass-fed, organic, etc.).

| Cut                    | Weight (lbs.) | % of Total Yield | Avg. Retail Price/lb. | Estimated Value |
|------------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Leg (Bone in/Boneless) | 11 to 14      | 20 - 25%         | \$9 - \$14            | \$99 - \$196    |
| Loin Chops             | 6 to 8        | 12 - 15%         | \$15 - \$25           | \$90 - \$200    |
| Rib Chops/Rack         | 5.5 to 8.5    | 10 - 15%         | \$18 - \$30           | \$99 - \$255    |
| Shoulder Roast/Chops   | 8.5 to 11     | 15 - 20%         | \$7 - \$12            | \$59 - \$132    |
| Shanks (2 total)       | 2 to 3        | ~5%              | \$6 - \$10            | \$12 - \$30     |
| Ground/Trim            | 11 to 14      | 20 - 25%         | \$7 - \$10            | \$56 - \$100    |

Note: Weights are approximations based on a 150 lb live animal yielding ~56 lbs. of packaged meat. Retail pricing reflects average U.S. market conditions as of 2025

### EVALUATE YOUR COSTS BEFORE YOU BUY

Calculate your local costs for feed, processing, and animal purchase before committing to raising a lamb for the freezer. Use available tools or worksheets to input regional prices and compare your projected expenses with local retail lamb prices. Contact your local extension office with any questions you may have.





UNIVERSITY  
OF WYOMING

## Extension Sheep Program

**This brief was created by UWyo Sheep Task Force**

**Author:**

Brian Lee, Research Scientist, University of Wyoming, Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension Center

**Edited by:**

UW Sheep Extension Team

**Sources:**

Marsh, D. 2023. U.S. Sheep Industry Economic Contribution Analysis.

2024. Livestock, Dairy, and Poultry Outlook: September 2024. Economic Research Service: Situation and Outlook Report. United States Department of Agriculture.

2023. Sheep Industry Review. American Sheep Industry Association.



[bit.ly/4brsdsC](https://bit.ly/4brsdsC)



(307) 766-2224

**UW SHEEP PROGRAM**